

Nutrient Enrichment (Biostimulation)

Objective: To accelerate the rate of oil hydrocarbon degradation due to natural microbial processes by adding nutrients (generally nitrogen and phosphorus) that stimulate microbial growth.

Description: If nutrients are a limiting factor (as measured using the interstitial pore water) in an area where shoreline oiling has occurred, water-soluble nutrients can be applied by a spray irrigation system. Nutrients should be applied daily if the impacted area gets completely submerged by tides and waves and if maximum biostimulation is desired. If the impacted area gets submerged only during spring tides, the frequency of nutrient addition will be determined by the intertidal zone water coverage. Slow-release granular or encapsulated nutrients or oleophilic fertilizer (which adheres to the oil residue on the surface) should require less frequent addition, but time-series monitoring of interstitial pore water nutrient levels is needed to ensure target levels are being maintained, especially throughout the depth of the impacted intertidal zone.

Applicable Habitat Types: Could be used on any shoreline habitat type where access is allowed and nutrients are deficient.

When to Use: On moderate- to heavily-oiled substrates, after other techniques have been used to remove free product; on lightly-oiled shorelines, where other techniques are destructive or ineffective; and where nutrients limit natural attenuation. Most effective on light to medium crude oils and fuel oils (asphaltenes tend to inhibit rapid biodegradation). Less effective where oil residues are thick. Not considered for gasoline spills, which evaporate rapidly.

Nutrient Enrichment (Biostimulation) (cont.)

- Biological Constraints: Avoid using ammonia-based fertilizers at highly elevated concentrations because un-ionized ammonia is toxic to aquatic life. Nitrate is an equally good nitrogen source, minus the toxicity. Sodium tripolyphosphate is a better phosphorus source than orthophosphates because it is more soluble in seawater. If nutrients are applied properly with adequate monitoring, eutrophication should not be a problem. Only nutrient additives proven to be nontoxic and effective in either the laboratory or the field should be used in the environment. Contact toxicity of oleophilic nutrients may restrict their use, as other chemicals in the product could be more toxic to aquatic organisms in the presence of oil.
- Environmental Effects: Detrimental effects to shoreline from foot or vehicle traffic caused by workers applying nutrients (unless nutrients are sprayed from a vessel or aircraft).
- Waste Generation: None.